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# **ONE OR TWO ARENAS?**

## **THE BREAK-UP BETWEEN NATIONAL AND REGIONAL ELECTIONS**

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## **Abstract**

This paper shows that the role of national electoral dynamics on regional elections is highly mediated by institutional and electoral constraints at the regional level. Using data on statewide parties' electoral competition in regional and national elections in Spain and Italy, results show that the contamination of regional elections is lower in regions where decentralization has travelled further and where strong regionalist parties dominate electoral competition. The paper also shows that these two channels -more regional authority and more regionalist competition- shape the regional manifestos of statewide parties by increasing their pro-regional positions. These findings represent a contribution to a better understanding of the extent to which regional elections are a separate electoral arena from the national one.

## Introduction

When are regional elections independent from national electoral dynamics? Does the influence of national elections on regional elections vary across federal countries? If so, why? This paper seeks to answer these questions by exploring how decentralization and regionalist parties affect statewide parties' electoral competition in the regional arena. The prevailing assumption in theories that espouse the efficiency or democratic promises of decentralization has been that electoral competition in different levels of government operates in separate ways, reflecting dual accountability (Rodden and Wibbels 2011). Yet studies on electoral competition in federations indicate that the electoral fate of regional incumbents is highly determined by national electoral dynamics (Gélineau and Bélanger, 2005, Remmer and Gélineau, 2003, Gélineau and Remmer, 2006, Niemi et al., 1995, Anderson, 2006a, Anderson, 2006b, Carsey and Wright, 1998, Hansen, 1999, Partin, 1995, Squire and Fastnow, 1994, Rogers 2017, among others).

This “second-order” nature of regional elections suggests an overlap between electoral arenas and implies weak or distorted accountability mechanisms at the regional level, as the impact of national elections makes incumbents' electoral success exogenous to their performance in office. However, the majority of empirical studies that question the independent status of regional elections are based on case-country studies -exceptions are Rodden and Wibbels (2011) or Schakel (2013). As a result, we still ignore the extent to which the “second-order” nature of regional elections varies across regions and the explanatory mechanisms that may account for this variation. In this paper we purport to make some advancement over the existing literature by exploring what explains the influence of federal electoral dynamics on regional elections in two parliamentary decentralized democracies: Spain and Italy.

The theoretical argument of this paper is that the impact of federal elections on regional elections (which we denominate “contamination” effects) depends on two constraints at the regional level: an institutional one –the degree of regional authority; and an electoral one –the strength of regionalist parties. Following previous theoretical works in the area (Authors 2014) we hypothesize that contamination will be lower in regions that have been endowed with extensive political and fiscal authority or where statewide parties face strong electoral competition from regionalist parties. Drawing on electoral results in regional in Spain and Italy for the 1980-2010 (Spain) and 1947-2010

(Italy) periods, results show that there is high variation in the effect of national electoral results on regional elections. In line with the hypotheses of the article, levels of decentralization and the strength of regionalist parties explain this variation both across regions and over time.

This article extends extant research in different ways. First, the paper provides a theory on the electoral impact of federal elections on the regional arena that is grounded on politicians' individual-level incentives. This approach helps to advance a literature that has provided extensive empirical evidence on the role of national elections in the subnational arena, but has lacked a sound development of the underlying theoretical mechanisms. Second, the empirical analysis in the paper makes some progress over recent contributions in the literature on territorial politics by providing a more nuanced estimation of national coattails in regional elections and by introducing a comparative approach that explores variation both across regions and over time<sup>1</sup>.

## **Decentralization, Party Systems and Contamination effects**

Since the path-breaking work on federalism by William Riker (Riker, 1964), scholars keep paying attention to the degree of integration of the party system to understand patterns of political competition across electoral tiers, the degree of contamination between federal and regional arenas, and its implications upon the stability of federations. A crucial condition to understand whether party systems in federations become more or less integrated is the degree of interdependence between the regional and the federal electoral arena, what the literature defines as the degree of “contamination” (Schakel 2013) between elections.<sup>2</sup>

The more normative accounts on decentralization from the Welfare Economics literature (Oates 1972) assume that voters are simply expected to track incumbents' performance at different levels of government and hold them responsible only for the powers they control. Regional elections therefore operate as a separate electoral arena, independent from national electoral competition (Rodden and Wibbels 2011). The more positive approach in the literature on electoral competition in decentralized contexts

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<sup>1</sup> The most common measure in the literature has been a “dissimilarity index”, (Schakel 2013) which measures the proportion of the electorate who would have to change their vote in order for the regional election to exhibit the same results as in the previous federal election in that region (see authors 2014 on the limitations of this index).

<sup>2</sup> Other literature refers to this as electoral externalities (Rodden and Wibbels 2011).

shows that the reality of regional elections is a far cry from the normative ideal: regional elections operate as a second-order arena, where voters cast their vote taking into account national issues or use the regional arena to support more preferred (but less viable) political parties (Reif and Schmitt 1980). However, new empirical evidence questions the second order nature of regional elections (see Schakel 2013, 2015; Schakel and Jeffery 2013; Dandoy and Schakel 2013; Clark and Rohrschneider 2009) and explores the conditions under which the electoral fate of regional politicians is more or less contingent upon regional performance and policy outcomes than upon national electoral dynamics (Cabeza et al. 2016).

The degree of interdependence between regional and federal elections is not a static feature of decentralized systems, but it may vary across institutional settings as well as over time. For instance, Schakel and Jeffery (2013) show that the second-order nature of regional elections is weaker in regions with high levels of decentralization and where non-statewide parties compete in regional elections. In addition, changes in levels of regional authority over time may weaken the role of national dynamics in regional elections (León 2014).

The effect of decentralization upon the second-order nature of regional elections is moderated by how political parties are internally organized and, in turn, by how they design their electoral strategies in regional elections. In more decentralized contexts state parties tend to be more autonomous from the national party line (Thorlakson 2009), which may contribute to a more “regionalized” pattern of electoral competition; whereas in more centralized federations political parties are more integrated<sup>3,4</sup>.

Likewise, decentralizing reforms in countries such as United Kingdom, Italy, Spain or Belgium have shifted the balance of organizational power within statewide parties from the federal party to state parties (Swenden and Maddens, 2009:16, Detterbeck and Jeffery, 2009:71, León-Alfonso, 2007:193 and ff., Fabre and Méndez-Lago, 2009:117). Statewide parties may not only implement changes in their internal organization in reaction to decentralization reforms, but also in their electoral platforms and message to continue to win seats across the territory (Hopkin (2003, 2009). The “regionalization”

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<sup>3</sup> Thorlakson (2009) shows that in layer cake models like Canada or US where subnational governments exercise have large powers over taxes and expenditures that are separate from the federal government, subnational branches become more autonomous. Conversely, in marble cake federal models like Germany or Austria, parties are more integrated and intergovernmental cooperation becomes smoother.

<sup>4</sup> The formal distribution of powers that is enshrined in party statutes does not quite capture the actual balance of power between national and subnational party elites: changes in formal internal organization may only happen well after a modification of regional-national power relations has been in place.

of statewide parties' electoral platforms may contribute to reinforce the “first-order” nature of regional elections by enhancing its independence from national electoral dynamics.

Finally, the extent to which regional elections become a second-order election has a lot to do with how much information voters hold about regional policy outcomes and whether they take it into account to evaluate regional incumbents. Decentralization may complicate the assignment of responsibilities over policy outcomes because policy competences are shared between the federal and the regional administration. If responsibility assignments are blurred, voters may end up using national policy outcomes as shortcuts to evaluate regional incumbents (which increases the interdependence between national and regional elections). However, clarity of responsibilities may be enhanced where decentralization has followed a more differentiated distribution of responsibilities (a “layer-cake” type of responsibility allocation, see León 2011). In contexts with higher clarity of responsibility it is more likely that voters support regional incumbents on the basis of regional policy outcomes (which increases the “first-order” nature of regional elections, that is, its “independence” from national dynamics (Anderson 2006a; León and Orriols 2017)).

The study of decentralization and its effects on statewide parties' electoral competition in the national and regional arena is not new. This approach has taken up a significant part of the literature on European territorial politics (Hough and Jeffery, 2006; Hough and Kob, 2009; Jeffery and Hough, 2009). However, in these studies voters are assumed to adopt a more regional logic of voting behavior in decentralized contexts but it is not clear what causes this change. This paper builds on previous theoretical works in the area (Authors 2014) and helps to advance the literature by focusing on regional elites' electoral incentives as the explanatory mechanism that moderates the effect of decentralization upon the degree of contamination between the federal and the regional arena. In addition, it tests the hypotheses in two countries that exhibit significant variation in decentralization both across regions and over time: Italy and Spain.

## **The Argument**

We argue the impact of federal electoral results on regional elections will decrease when subnational elites of statewide parties have incentives to follow

differentiated electoral strategies from their national co-partisans. Pursuing a differentiated electoral strategy or sticking to the national party guidelines involve different costs and benefits. The incentives of a regional politician of a statewide party to follow a differentiated (and more regional-oriented) electoral strategy from her national counterparts are contingent upon the institutional and electoral constraints they face at the regional level, namely: (i) the nature of decentralized powers and regional authority; and (ii) the existence of regionalist parties that challenge statewide parties' electoral support.

### *The Institutional Constraint: Decentralization and the contamination between electoral arenas*

Subnational elites' electoral incentives are driven by a cost-benefit electoral calculus when deciding about adopting independent policy strategies versus accommodating to the preferences of the national elite. The fundamental idea is that decentralization fosters the incentives of statewide parties' regional leaders to follow independent electoral strategies by increasing their associated benefits and diminishing their costs.

First, high levels of decentralization increase the benefits associated to regional office. When decentralization is high decentralization, regional governments have more decision-making and financing powers. This means that regional governments control a higher share of total public expenditures and will have decision-making capacity over its financing. In this context, regional leaders of statewide parties will have incentives to develop policy programs that are different from the national party agenda (Mazzoleni 2009). High levels of decentralization enable subnational politicians to address particular demands of regional constituencies and therefore to increase the likelihood of their political survival without depending on their national counterpart. Put differently, when decentralization of fiscal and political powers increases, differentiated policy programs become an appealing electoral strategy to allow the regional leader of a statewide party to adapt her electoral pledges to specific regional conditions, constituencies and interest groups (Alonso and Gómez 2010; Detterbeck and Jeffery 2009:71).

Second, as stated above, previous studies show that decentralization is associated with a process of centrifugation of the party organization (see Hepburn 2018



for a review). As decentralization unfolds, the balance of power within statewide parties flows from the national elite towards subnational copartisans, who improve their leverage within the party organization (Swenden and Madden 2009: 16). Greater autonomy of regional leaders diminishes the potential costs associated with the development of strategies that deviate from the position of the statewide party as a whole (Maddens and Libbrecht 2009: 228). In addition, the opportunity costs of following a differentiation strategy also decrease with higher levels of decentralization as the possibility of running a regional-level political career is more attractive for a given individual politician (Myerson 2006, Borchert and Stolz 2011, Cordero and Collier 2014).

Both ways, we expect that higher decentralization should be associated with higher incentives (increasing benefits and diminishing costs) by subnational elites to follow differentiated party strategies and independent policy agendas. Given this, as decentralization unfolds heterogeneous regional policy programs should increase the visibility of regional party leaders against their national copartisans, which will enhance the “first-order” nature of regional elections. This means that the regional arena is no longer regarded as a simple mirror of the national arena. In summary, we assume that decentralization affects national coattails through the pathway of differentiated party strategies. As decentralization increases it is an optimal strategy for both the federal party leader and the regional elite of statewide parties to allow and develop this differentiation strategy to become more competitive in regional elections –even if the price to pay is some centrifugation of the party. Unless the national party leader is willing to assume the risk of losing in some regional elections, he should be able to sacrifice at least partially the degree of party unity and the degree of homogenization of its regional platforms across the territory.

### *The Electoral Constraint: Regionalist Parties and Contamination effects*

There is an additional constraint that may enhance regional leaders of statewide parties to follow independent policy agendas: electoral competition with regionalist parties. The existence of political competition with strong regionalist parties directly threatens the political power of statewide parties at the subnational level. Oftentimes regionalist parties put forward demands for greater regional authority and fiscal powers. As a consequence, regionalist parties change dramatically the landscape of party

competition at the regional level. Subnational copartisans of statewide parties may need to address the electoral demands for greater autonomy of regionalist parties when competing for regional office. They will be more likely to engage in electoral campaigning centered on regional interests and centrifugal demands to preserve voters that otherwise might defect and vote for regionalist parties (Meguid 2015). As Bélanger et al. (2018) state, in regions with strong regionalist parties (such as Québec and Scotland), the “national question” becomes “the structural pillar of electoral politics” (2018: 17). If competing for regional office involves championing regional interests, regional copartisans will be less prone to abide by the position of the statewide party as a whole and more likely to follow differentiated strategies. Therefore, we expect that contamination effects will decrease in those jurisdictions where statewide parties face an electoral threat from regionalist parties.

Thus, we can summarize our main hypotheses in the following way:

**Hypothesis 1 (Institutional constraint effect):** Statewide parties’ contamination effects will be lower, the higher the levels of political and fiscal decentralization.

**Hypothesis 2 (Electoral constraint effect):** Statewide parties’ contamination effects for statewide parties will be lower, the higher the electoral strength of regionalist parties in subnational elections.

To test these hypotheses, our empirical analysis is two-fold. In the first part, we analyze contamination effects in regional elections in Spain and Italy. In these countries decentralization has proceeded in a spiral dynamic and devolution of responsibilities has been asymmetric across regions. In Spain, after the 1978 Spanish Constitution, there were 10 regions (known as “ordinary regions”) that accessed autonomy through the *slow-track* procedure, which involved initial lower levels of power. The *mixed-track* regions -Catalonia, Galicia, Andalusia, Comunidad Valenciana, and Canary Islands- accessed autonomy with more far-reaching powers. Finally, *fast-track* regions - the Basque Country, and Navarre – were additionally endowed with a different system of financing that granted them full autonomy over taxation. The case of Italy also exhibits great variation in decentralization, both between regions and over time. After World War II, the five regions (Aosta Valley, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Sardinia, Sicily, and Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol) with most pronounced cultural and linguistic differences were granted a special statute. These statutes covered powers on many areas, and, depending on the region, different fiscal capacity. On the other hand, the remaining 15 regions with ordinary statute were not created until 1970. Their levels of autonomy have

also varied over time, since the 2001 constitutional reform augmented their legislative powers and slightly increased their fiscal autonomy.

This means that the most important source of variation in Italy and Spain is *between regions and over time*. Accordingly, we explore regional differences in contamination effects and we test whether they vary consistently with our hypotheses. With this aim, we analyze whether increasing levels of decentralization in Spanish and Italian regions decrease the influence of the national arena on the regional one over time. In addition, we explore if contamination effects from national elections are lower in those Italian and Spanish regions with stronger regionalist parties. We predict higher contamination effects in those regions where levels of decentralized authority are low and where statewide parties do not face strong competition from regionalist parties<sup>5</sup>. Secondly, to explore further the electoral incentives of the regional elites we also test how both decentralization and party competition affects the regional party platforms of statewide parties in Spain and their positions on the center-periphery dimension using data on regional manifestos.

## **A cross-regional analysis of electoral contamination effects in Italy and Spain**

We test our hypotheses using panel models. For the Spanish case we run panel data models at the region-party level that also include region-party fixed effects<sup>6</sup>. The average number of observations at the region-party level is 6.5 and therefore we can exploit a significant amount of variation over time (elections) within a given party in a given region –i.e. at the region-party level. For Italy, instead, we do not include region-party fixed effects because the average number of observations at region-party level is much lower. All models, for both Spain and Italy, also include period effect dummies to account for unobserved time-related heterogeneity. We include the same controls and follow the same parsimonious strategy in both countries. Finally, the standard errors are clustered at the region-party level to account for the region-party structure of our data.

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<sup>5</sup> We are focusing here on electoral results. For an analysis of the differential impact of national elections on individual-level behavior in regional elections across regions, see Liñeira (2016).

<sup>6</sup> The models do not include a lag dependent variable (LDV) in order to avoid a potential Nickell bias in our estimates. The results are robust, however, to the inclusion of a lagged dependent variable.

In the Online Appendix, though, we include further robustness checks in which we do not cluster at the region-party level and the results remain the same.

On one hand, the dependent variable is the percentage of votes in regional elections of statewide party  $j$  at time  $t$  in region  $i$  [*Regional Election Share*]. Thus, we can directly include measures of decentralization and the strength of regionalist parties at the regional level that will assist us in capturing differences between regions. On the other hand, the main independent variable of interest is the percentage of votes of party  $j$  in region  $i$  in the previous national election [ $t-k$ ] [*National Election Share*], where  $k$  is the number of years between regional elections and previous national elections. Hence, our unit of analysis is the party-region-election. Therefore, we operationalize *contamination effects* as the impact of previous national electoral outcomes in subsequent regional electoral results. The higher the coefficient of *National Electoral Share*, the higher the impact of national elections on regional ones.

Additional variables measured at the time of regional elections [ $t$ ] are included as covariates in all models. We introduce the *number of days* passed between national and regional elections and its interaction with the electoral result in the previous national election. It is reasonable to expect that the impact of national elections on regional electoral results will become weaker the longer the time span between national and regional elections (Jeffery and Hough 2009, Schakel and Dandoy 2014). National elections that take place well before regional elections will be less influential than national elections that take place a few months before or at the same time than regional elections.

We also include further controls related to the incumbency status of parties and type of regional government. The variable *Affiliated* is coded as 1 when the regional government belongs to the ruling party at the national level and *Prime Minister* is a dummy variable that measures whether party  $j$  rules the regional government. An affiliated incumbent may face an electoral disadvantage in regional elections as a consequence of the midterm punishment effect (Rodden and Wibbels, 2011:7, Hough and Jeffery, 2006:126). To control for this effect, we interact the *Affiliation* and *Prime Minister* variables. Finally, clarity of responsibilities is lower in coalition governments (Powell and Whitten 1993), which may weaken the impact of performance on the electoral support of regional incumbent parties (Thorlakson 2016). Accordingly, the *Coalition Member* variable measures whether party  $j$  belongs to a coalition government

at the regional level. We expect that the blame avoidance game between members of the coalition allow parties to survive better to electoral accountability.

First, we start investigating the “institutional constraint effect” in the two countries by including an interaction term between *National Election Share* and a measure of decentralization. Since we are interested in a measure of decentralization that varies both across time and regions we use the *Self Rule* Index developed by Hooghe et al (2016). This variable allows us to capture the level of authority exercised by a regional government over those within the regional territory. The *Self-Rule* index is introduced at the time of the previous national election, which means that effectively we use one lag, as we expect institutional constraints at time  $t$  to have an influence on the following electoral contests<sup>7</sup>. We then turn to test the “electoral constraint hypothesis” by adding an interaction term between the *National Election Share* at time  $t-k$  and the strength of regionalist parties in the previous term –which is equivalent to using a lag value. We constructed the *Regionalist Parties Share* variable, which measures the electoral strength of regionalist parties in the subnational legislature before regional elections take place. Specifically, this variable codes the vote share in the region of those parties that: 1) get seat representation in the regional assembly; 2) compete just in some regions, and not in the whole country; 3) the party’s manifesto contains claims for more autonomy (or secession). Therefore, the interaction between *National Election Share* and *Regionalist Parties Share* serves to test the second hypothesis, as it captures whether the impact of national coattails in regional elections varies according to the electoral strength of regionalist parties.

Models reported in Table 1 show how both the degree of self-rule at the regional level and the dynamics of party competition affect the prevalence of regional electoral arenas in Spain<sup>8</sup>. Models 1.1 and 1.2 include gradually the two interaction terms, and models 1.3 and 1.4 include the set of controls and the period fixed effects. As expected, the negative and significant coefficient for the interaction terms between the national electoral shares and the lag of the self-rule component of the regional authority index estimated in Table 1 indicate that the greater the level of decentralization in a particular

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<sup>7</sup> In the Online Appendix we show results using the more general Regional Authority Index, which remain the same. We also display in the Appendix analyses using contemporaneous values that yield insignificant estimators, confirming that changes in the two hypothesized channels precede changes in the level of contamination.

<sup>8</sup> The analyses show the results for PP and PSOE. In Navarre, PP contests in some elections as part of a coalition with UPN, which at the same time can be labelled as a regionalist party. We do not include the results for this party in this region.

region, the lower the contamination effects in the next electoral contest for those statewide parties that compete in that region. Given that the models exploit within region-party variation, the results imply that as decentralization levels have increased over time in Spain, contamination effects have declined.

On the other hand, the interaction between *National Election Share* and *Regionalist Parties Share* is also negative and significant. These results provide evidence that contamination effects become less important in regions with a higher degree of autonomy and, alternatively, when there are strong regionalist parties. In other words, the separation between electoral arenas is greater in the *Comunidades Autónomas* either when regionalist parties are strong or when regional self-rule powers are high. This either/or regarding the two potential mechanisms is important because it confirms that the two channels operate separately: the institutional and the electoral one. This finding also corroborates previous empirical analyses (León 2014). Regarding the effect of the covariates, as expected there is an incumbent effect since when a party rules the regional government its electoral returns increase. We also find a negative effect for the coalition dummy in Spain, which means that statewide parties do not benefit from being in regional coalition governments. The controls for the electoral timing (days passed) and partisan affiliation do not have statistically significant effects.

**[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]**

**[TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]**

Models depicted in Table 2 report very similar results for the Italian case. Results confirm the support for our two main hypotheses and corroborate that they also operate separately in Italy. As before, the interaction term between the regional self-rule index and the national electoral shares is negative and significant across all models. However, the results in models 2.2 and 2.4 also show that the greater the electoral share of regionalist parties, the lower the contamination effects for statewide parties in subsequent regional elections. Taken altogether, models in Table 2 suggest that the increase in decentralization levels across many Italian regions plus the increase of the electoral strength of regionalist parties are causing a gradual reduction in contamination effects in Italy. In other words, the changing dynamics of regional party competition and the increasing decentralization trends are jointly affecting the extent to which national coattails impact subnational elections.

In order to illustrate and summarize the last set of results for Spain and Italy, Figures 1 and 2 show how the marginal effects capturing contamination effects vary depending on the values of the *Regional Self Rule index* and the *Regionalist Parties Share* at the regional-level. In both figures, the decreasing marginal effects show the role of the electoral and institutional constraints. Again, it is striking to observe how similar the results are when comparing Spain and Italy. In Spain, in regions where the degree of self-rule is low or moderately low the contamination effects are almost one-to-one. However, in regions where self-rule is higher (when it takes value 15), the contamination effects decline to 0.5. In other words, just 4 points-difference in the self-rule index explain a reduction of more than a half in the estimated contamination. On the other hand, when the strength of regionalist parties is high or very high (above 40% of the vote shares), then the contamination effects are also lower than 0.5.

In Italy, the picture is very similar. A greater self-rule component of regional authority is associated with much lower contamination effects. Effectively, when the self-rule index increases 5 points (from 10 to 15), the electoral contamination declines from 0.77 to 0.55. The magnitude of this effect is less pronounced, however, than the one estimated for the Spanish case. On the other hand, the strength of regionalist parties is also associated with lower electoral contamination. If regionalist parties are non-existing or very weak, then the contamination effect is around 0.8. However, in regions where regionalist parties get 40% or more of the vote shares, the electoral contamination declines to levels below 0.6. This effect is therefore more similar in magnitude to the one estimated for the Spanish case. Regarding the covariates, we also find a regional incumbent effect and a positive effect of belonging to a regional coalition government, which is coherent with the expectations that parties can benefit from blurring responsibilities in a coalition. Similar to the Spanish case, we do not find significant effects for the electoral timing variables and neither for the partisan affiliation.

**[FIGURES 2 AND 3 ABOUT HERE]**

*Testing the Mechanism. Regional Party Platforms of Statewide Parties: the Spanish Case*

In the theoretical section we argued that the mechanisms that account for lower contamination in contexts where decentralization and regionalist vote share are high effects are related to the electoral incentives of statewide parties' subnational elites. To test this mechanism in a more direct way, we use data from Spain, and specifically from the Regional Manifestos Project (Gómez et al. 2012). These data provide measures of the position on the center-periphery dimension for the regional election manifestos of Spanish parties (unfortunately data for Italy are limited to one electoral cycle, so we cannot use it for this analysis).

If the mechanism that we propose to explain the results is right, we should expect that in the regions with higher levels of decentralization and with stronger regionalist parties, the subnational elites of state wide parties will compete on more regional platforms that will place a stronger emphasis both on regional issues and the center-periphery dimension<sup>9</sup>. León (2017) provided some initial evidence elite survey data that within-party variation in preferences towards regional self-rule of parliamentary elites are explained by the type of region where they are elected and the arena where they are elected (national vs. regional).

To test this mechanism, we take data from the regional manifestos of PP and PSOE in all regional elections since the transition to democracy. We use two dependent variables. First, we use the position of each regional manifesto in the center-periphery dimension. This variable allows us to capture how much a subnational branch of a statewide party centers its electoral pledge around the territorial dimension and, more specifically, in terms of competing on a platform that demands more power to the regions. Secondly, we use the ratio between the position in the center-periphery dimension in each regional election manifesto and the average position of the center periphery in all regional election manifestos. This variable allows us to capture how much a subnational branch of a state-wide party deviates from its party in terms of the position in the territorial dimension in their electoral platform and, more specifically, in terms of making an electoral pledge for more power to the regions. When the variable has a value above 1, it means that the subnational branch has a more pro-periphery position than parties' average, while a value below 1 implies a more pro-center position. Using these two dependent variables, we run regressions to test the effect of our two

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<sup>9</sup> Notwithstanding our argument, Muller and Bernauer (2018) analyze parties's regional deviations from national-level position in Switzerland and account for other ideological, temporal, vote- and canto-specific factors that can explain variation in the positions.



main independent variables: level of self-rule in the region and regionalist vote share. The OLS regressions include regional dummies, several covariates<sup>10</sup>, and clustered standard errors.

Results are presented in Table 3 and validate our main mechanisms. First, we can observe that the level of self-rule in a particular region explains whether a statewide party takes a stronger position in the center-periphery dimension in that region compared to the average regional branch of the same party [Models 3.1 and 3.4]. In addition, when we include the regionalist party strength in the previous election, the effect goes in the same direction [Models 3.2 and 3.5]. State wide parties position themselves more extremely in the center-periphery dimension in regions with stronger regionalist parties. When both variables are included in the models, both of them keep their sign as well as conventional levels of significance [Models 3.3 and 3.6]<sup>11</sup>.

### **[TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE]**

Results show that where the institutional and electoral constraints are stronger, regional politicians of statewide parties will design more independent electoral platforms, which that will make their results less dependent on the electoral fate of their national branch. These processes, however, are obviously self-reinforcing. To address concerns of endogeneity, we run two difference-in-difference analyses. We exploit two seemingly exogenous shocks that are related to our hypotheses. First, we analyze the effect upon regional manifestos of a significant increase in decentralization in Spain in 2002, when Spanish slow-track regions were endowed with health care powers. As we mentioned above, some regions in Spain accessed to self-rule with more limited powers (slow-track regions), although it was foreseen in the Spanish Constitution that they could ask for an upgrading of competences five years after the approval of their Statute of Autonomy. An agreement about the upgrading of slow-track regions' competences actually took place during the second half of the 1990s. The gap in expenditure powers between slow-track and the rest was virtually closed in 2002, with the transfer of health care powers to ten slow-track regions.

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<sup>10</sup> We include as a covariates the vote share of the party at the regional level in national elections, the subnational left-right position of the regional manifesto -as Massetti and Schakel (2015) have shown that left wing positions in Spain they can correlate with party's regionalism-, and the saliency of the center-periphery dimension in the regional manifesto, as well as the regional dummies.

<sup>11</sup> In alternative analyses not reported here, we have replicated the model specification including an interaction between both dependent variables. However, we do not find interactive effects. Both variables seem to have independent and unconditional effects.

To test the effect of further decentralization on regional manifestos, we therefore use 2002 as a cutoff point. We analyze the center-periphery position of the regional election manifestos of PP and PSOE pre-2002 and post-2002 and account for the differences in the changes in slow-track regions compared to the rest. To do a controlled comparison, we only include manifestos from the five previous and subsequent years to the cutoff-point. In figure 3 we show the difference-in-difference estimator. As we can see, there is a clear positive impact of further decentralization on the pro-periphery position of statewide parties in regional elections. On average, slow-track regions increased in 8 points their positions in the centre-periphery dimension. The average position is 5.8 and the standard deviation is 9.4, so the effect is sizeable.

As a robustness check we run two further tests. First, we replicate the analysis but only comparing slow-track regions with mixed-track regions. We exclude from the comparison the Basque country and Navarre as those were regions that already had higher powers. The magnitude of the effect decreases slightly, but the significance increases. Secondly, we use a placebo test and provide the diff-in-diff estimator of slow-track regions compared to the rest, but using 2004 as a cutoff point. This is the year Rodríguez Zapatero became President and pushed a wave of reforms in regional constitutions that increased the pro-decentralization positions of both PP and PSOE in many regions. We see no significant impact on the differential changes in the center-periphery positions of statewide parties when using 2004 as cut-off point.

### **[FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE]**

Our second hypothesis refers to the impact of regionalist electoral competition on the regional electoral agendas of statewide parties. To account for this mechanism we run a diff-in-diff analysis using 2008 as a cutoff point. This is the year the financial crisis started. Previous research argues that economic crises may contribute to fragment national party systems by spurring grievances from regionalist parties and, in turn, by increasing their electoral strength (Jurado and León 2017). Following this argument, we expect that in those Spanish regions where regionalist parties have been traditionally strongest, the economic crisis will result in a more intense regionalist threat and, as a result, state wide parties will react by increasing in those regions their regional electoral agendas' pro-periphery positions. We test this argument in the four Spanish regions where regionalist parties have been traditionally strong: Catalonia, Basque Country, Galicia, and the Canary Islands. All of them have consistently had strong regionalist representation in their regional assemblies, and therefore those are the regions were an

exogenous shock is more likely to result in increasing competition around centre-periphery issues (as compared to the remaining regions). In a second operationalization, we also test the argument including Navarre and Cantabria in the “regionalist” group of regions<sup>12</sup>.

#### [FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE]

Results are exhibited in Figure 4. They show that in both cases the diff-in-diff estimator point to a positive effect of the crisis on the pro-periphery positions of statewide parties in regions where regionalism is prevalent. On average, the impact is of almost 4 points in the center-periphery scale. This confirms that an exogenous shock like the financial crisis, which can have an effect on encouraging regionalist demands of regionalist parties, induces an adaptation of the regional branches of statewide parties to electoral pledges that gravitate around the territorial dimension. As a robustness check, we use the same placebo as in the previous analysis, yielding, as expected, an insignificant estimator.

### Concluding Remarks

This paper has shown that the impact of national elections on regional elections is highly moderated by institutional and electoral constraints at the regional level. The empirical analysis shows that contamination effects are lower in regions where decentralization has travelled further. Empirical results also corroborate that contamination decreases in regional elections where strong regionalist parties dominate electoral competition. Finally, we have also shown that these constraints affect the position on the center-periphery dimension of regional branches of statewide parties.

There are several ways in which these results could be extended. One potential research path is to provide further empirical evidence on the causal pathway that relates decentralization with contamination effects. In this paper, the causal mechanism at the theoretical level establishes regional elites’ strategies as the most important moderating factor between institutional reforms and changes in individuals’ voting behavior in national and regional elections. We have also provided a first test of this mechanism. Further research could explore from a qualitative approach more precisely the extent to

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<sup>12</sup> In these two regions, regionalism has been also above 20%. In Cantabria regionalism has been high since the mid-nineties mostly due to PRC (Partido Regionalista de Cantabria)

which the electoral agendas and strategies of the regional leaders of statewide parties are gradually shaped by increasing decentralization and regionalist parties' competition.

A second research path is to develop comparative work on political parties and how they moderate the relationship between decentralization and contamination effects. In this paper we have not differentiated among national statewide parties, but further research could explore whether ideology, organization or historical party trajectories may account for variation in the way decentralization affects party organization and, in turn, the breakup of electoral arenas.

Our paper also encourages further analysis of the implications of contamination effects on regional accountability. As stated in the introduction, national coattails may decrease the incentives of regional incumbents to be responsive to the demands of their constituencies, as their electoral results depend on factors other than regional performance. However, that decentralization weakens the influence of the national electoral arena does not necessarily mean that regional accountability is enhanced. Further analysis is needed showing that a weakening of electoral interdependence makes regional incumbents' electoral fate more reliant on their performance in office.

Finally, exploring the contamination between statewide parties' federal and regional electoral results has some implications that go well beyond the study of electoral patterns of competition. As some theorists argue, the degree of stability of the federation is highly dependent on the degree of centralization and integration of the party system (Riker 1964). By analyzing the explanatory factors of centrifugal electoral dynamics within statewide parties, this paper contributes to the development of an electoral logic of the stability of federal and decentralized arrangements. In turn, it may ultimately affect the stability of the federal bargain. Further exploration of these incentives and the relation between national and regional arenas may contribute to a better understanding of the extent to which some of the efficiency and stability promises of decentralization are actually fulfilled.

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## FIGURES AND TABLES

Table 1				
SPAIN: Contamination Effects	Model 1.1	Model 1.2	Model 1.3	Model 1.4
National Electoral Share	2.669*** (0.598)	3.698*** (0.917)	2.862*** (0.800)	3.379*** (0.807)
Self-Rule Index (lag)	7.778*** (1.849)	10.500*** (2.381)	8.937*** (2.881)	8.450*** (2.772)
National Electoral Share X Self Rule Index (lag)	-0.158*** (0.045)	-0.229*** (0.065)	-0.163** (0.063)	-0.192*** (0.062)
Regionalist Parties Share (lag)		0.309** (0.123)		0.293*** (0.103)
National Electoral Share X Reg. Parties Share (lag)		-0.006* (0.003)		-0.006** (0.003)
Regional Prime Minister			7.860*** (1.680)	8.400*** (1.624)
Affiliated			-0.164 (2.041)	0.263 (2.113)
Regional PM X Affiliated			-4.404 (2.737)	-4.820 (2.849)
Coalition Member			-3.250*** (1.066)	-3.782*** (1.027)
Days Passed			0.006 (0.004)	0.007 (0.004)
National Electoral Share X Days Passed			-0.000 (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)
Constant	-89.545*** (24.100)	-131.003*** (33.300)	-113.318*** (37.099)	-113.076*** (35.446)
Region-Party Fixed Effects	YES	YES	YES	YES
Period Fixed Effects	NO	NO	YES	YES
Observations	212	211	212	211
R-squared	0.442	0.463	0.543	0.555
Number of RP (party-regions)	33	33	33	33

Clustered standard errors at the region-party level in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1



Table 2				
ITALY: Contamination Effects	Model 2.1	Model 2.2	Model 2.3	Model 2.4
National Electoral Share	1.715*** (0.174)	1.638*** (0.173)	1.437*** (0.238)	1.236*** (0.199)
Self-Rule Index (lag)	1.381*** (0.390)	1.332*** (0.396)	0.606 (0.382)	0.473 (0.394)
National Electoral Share X Self Rule Index (lag)	-0.090*** (0.018)	-0.082*** (0.018)	-0.063** (0.026)	-0.041* (0.021)
Regionalist Parties Share (lag)		-0.051 (0.041)		0.016 (0.046)
National Electoral Share X Reg. Parties Share (lag)		-0.003 (0.003)		-0.006*** (0.002)
Regional Prime Minister			3.662*** (1.338)	3.755*** (1.330)
Affiliated			0.831* (0.468)	0.705 (0.451)
Regional PM X Affiliated			-0.756 (0.966)	-0.416 (0.990)
Coalition Member			1.541*** (0.479)	1.509*** (0.528)
Days Passed			0.000 (0.001)	0.000 (0.001)
National Electoral Share X Days Passed			-0.000 (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)
Constant	-10.376*** (4.006)	-9.363** (3.948)	-2.785 (3.892)	-0.666 (4.002)
Region-Party Fixed Effects	NO	NO	NO	NO
Period Fixed Effects	NO	NO	YES	YES
Observations	369	369	298	298
Number of RP (party-regions)	124	124	117	117

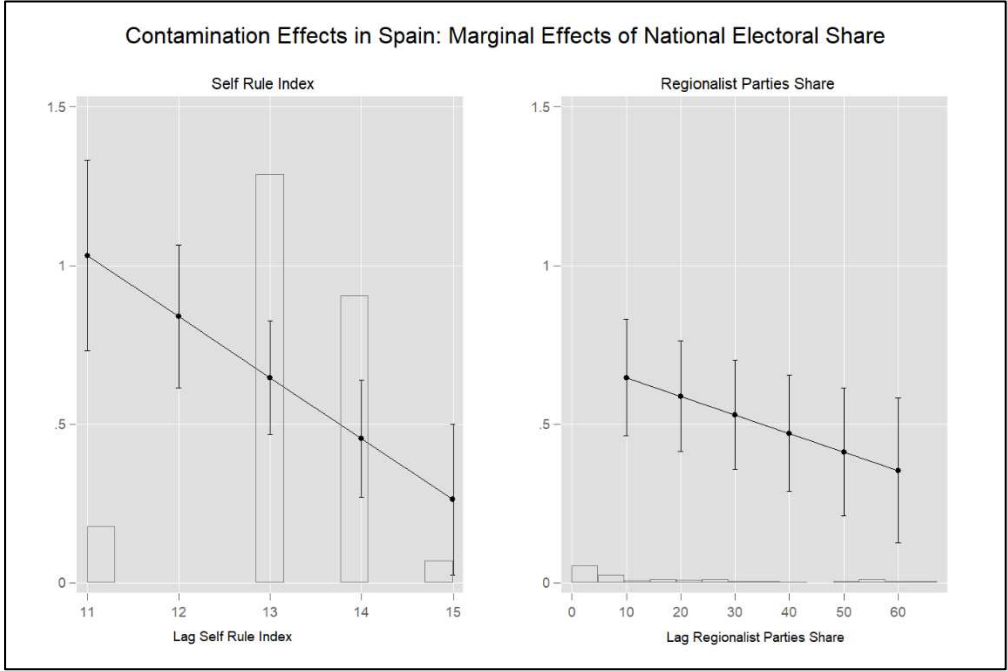
Clustered standard errors at the region-party level in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

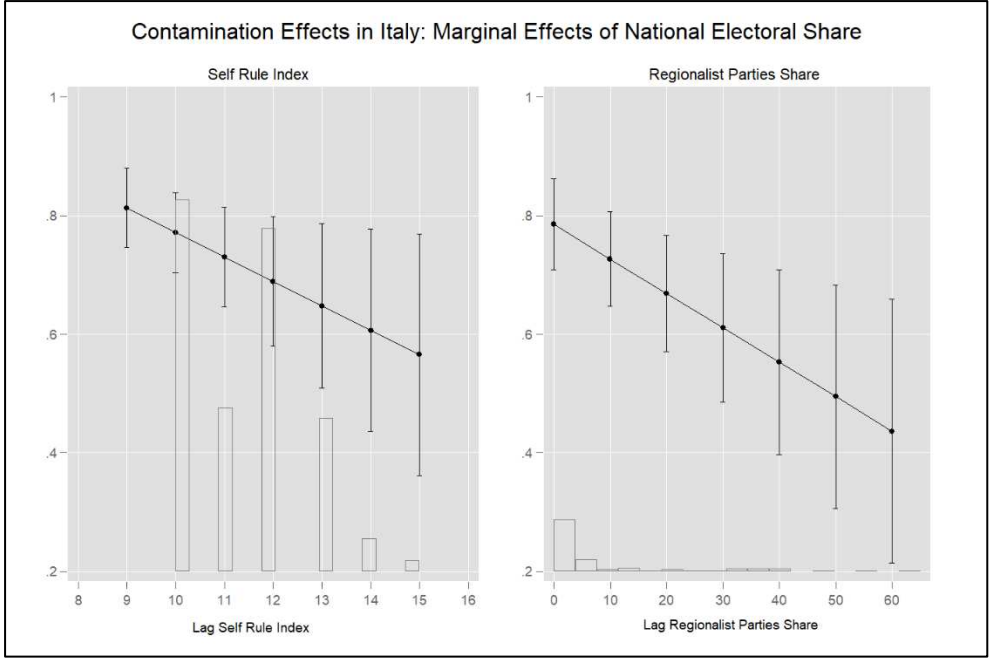
Table 3 SPAIN: Centre- Periphery Manifestos	Dependent Variable: Center-periphery position			Dependent Variable: Deviation from Center-periphery average		
	Model 3.1	Model 3.2	Model 3.3	Model 3.4	Model 3.5	Model 3.6
Self-Rule Index	0.654** (0.282)		0.661** (0.292)	0.113** (0.0486)		0.114** (0.0503)
Regionalist Parties Share		0.0415* (0.0210)	0.0413** (0.0187)		0.00715* (0.00361)	0.00712** (0.00323)
Covariates	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Region Fixed Effects	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Observations	180	178	178	180	178	178
R-squared	0.971	0.971	0.972	0.971	0.971	0.972

Regional dummies not shown. Clustered standard errors in parentheses, \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

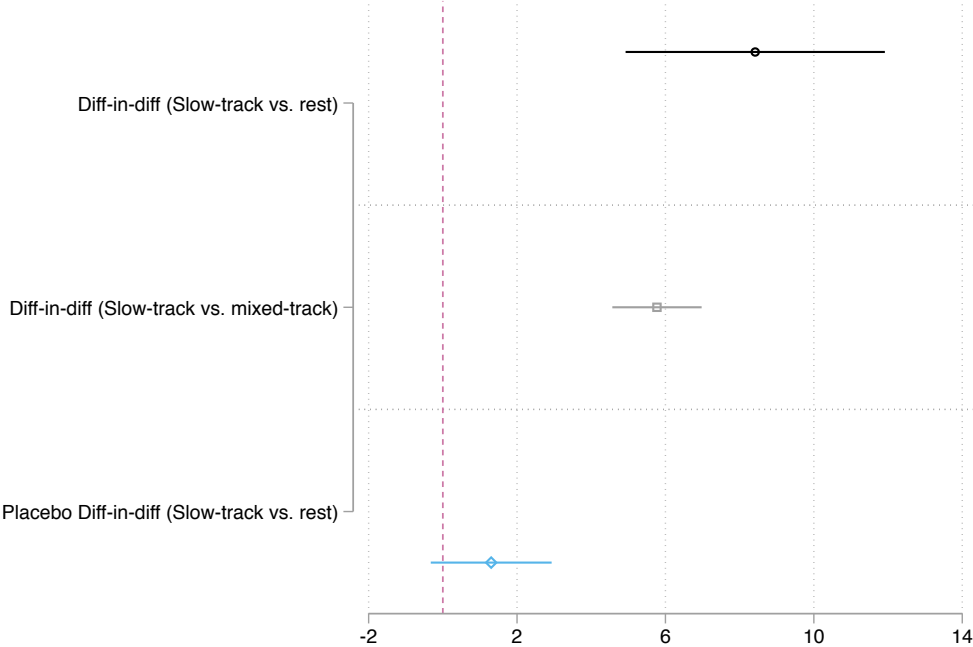
**FIGURE 1: SPAIN**



**FIGURE 2: ITALY**

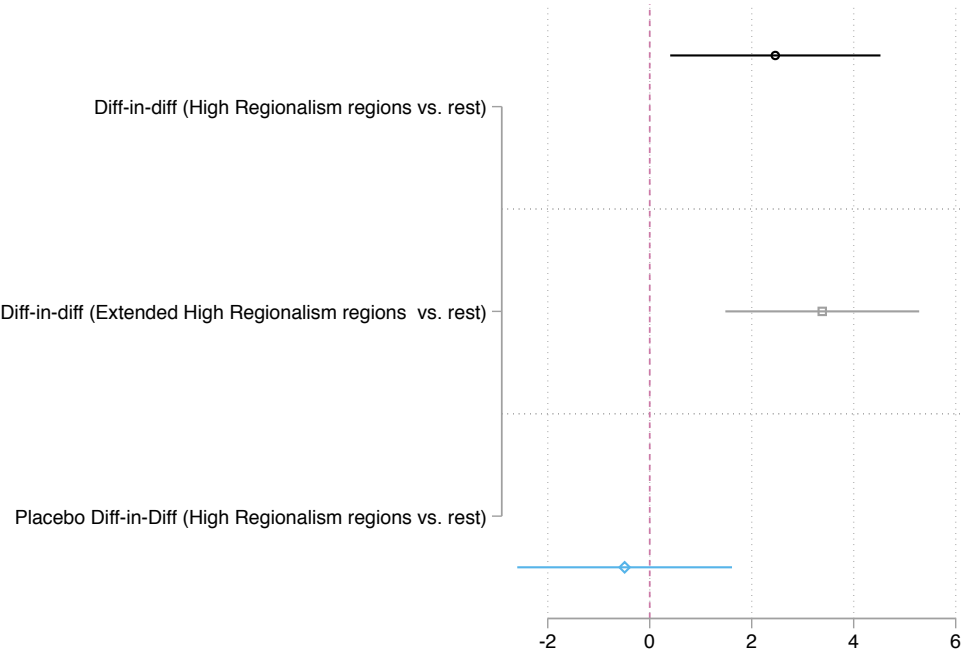


**FIGURE 3: DIFF-IN-DIFF ESTIMATORS. EFFECT OF DECENTRALIZATION OF HEALTH SERVICES**



**Note: Markers show the diff-in-diff estimators. 90% confidence intervals**

**FIGURE 4: DIFF-IN-DIFF ESTIMATORS. EFFECT OF FINANCIAL CRISIS**



**Note: Markers show the diff-in-diff estimators. 90% confidence intervals**

## **SUPPLEMENTARY APPENDIX: ADDITIONAL TABLES AND FIGURES**

**Appendix 1: Sample of Analysis**

**Appendix 2: Descriptive Trends**

**Appendix 3: Analyses using Regional Authority Index (RAI)**

**Appendix 4: Analyses without Clustering**

**Appendix 5: Analyses with Contemporaneous Values**

## APPENDIX 1: SAMPLE OF ANALYSIS

**Table A.1: Sample of analysis**

<i>Country</i>	<i>Elections</i>	<i>Parties</i>	<i>Period</i>
Italy	Regional Elections	Democrazia Cristiana, Partito Comunista, Partito Socialista, Forza Italia, Partito Democratico dell Sinistra, Alleanza Nazionale (and MSI), Popolo della Libertá, Partito Demócráico	1947-2010
Spain	Autonomous Communities Elections	PSOE, PP, UCD	1980-2010

## APPENDIX 2: DESCRIPTIVE TRENDS

FIGURE A.1: Evolution of National and Regional Electoral Shares, PP, Spain

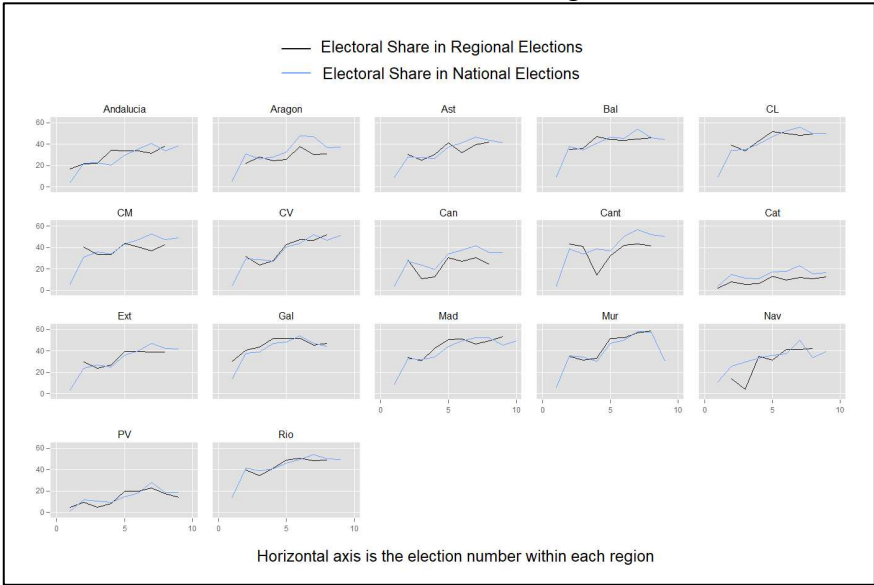


FIGURE A.2: Evolution of National and Regional Electoral Shares, PSOE, Spain

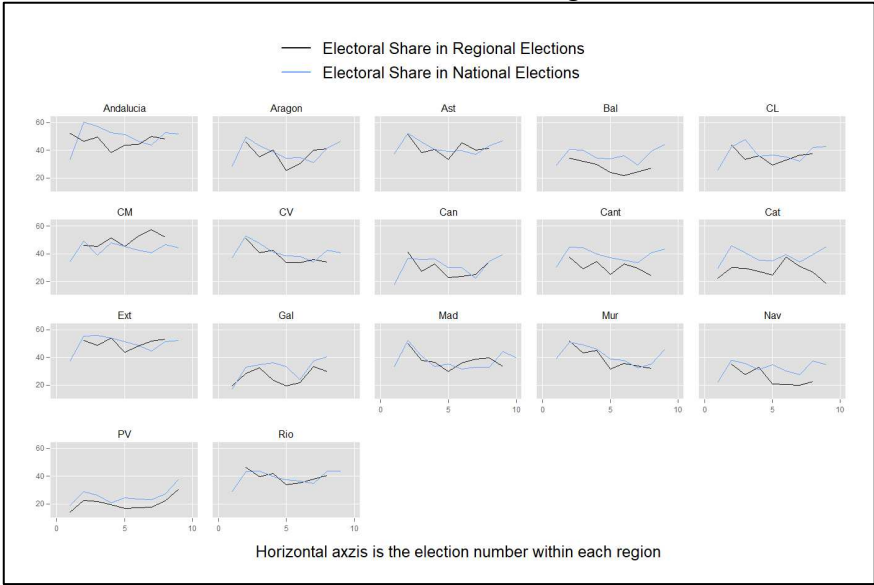


FIGURE A.3: Evolution Regional Authority Index and Self Rule Index in Spain



FIGURE A.4: Evolution Regional Authority Index and Self Rule Index in Italy

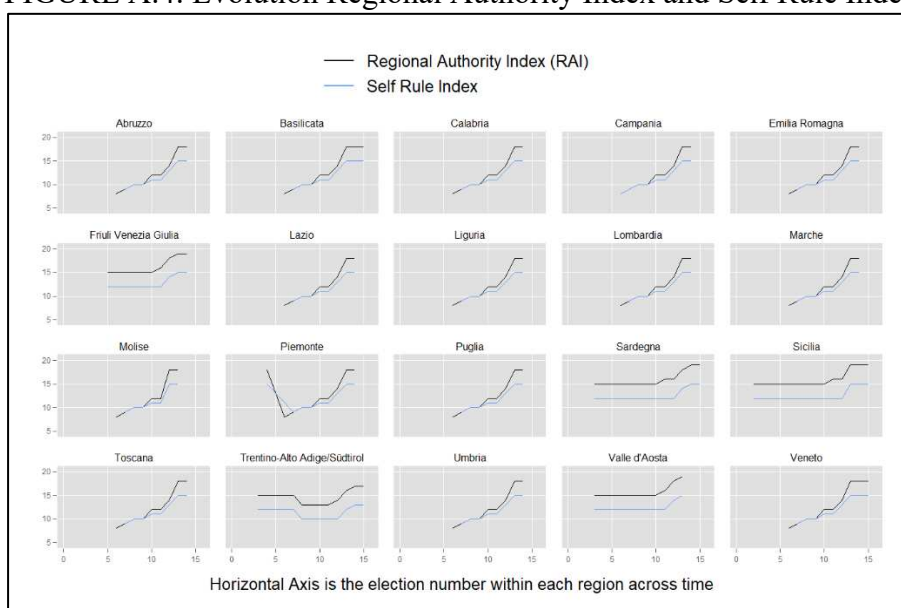


FIGURE A.5: Evolution of Regionalist Parties Electoral Shares in Spain



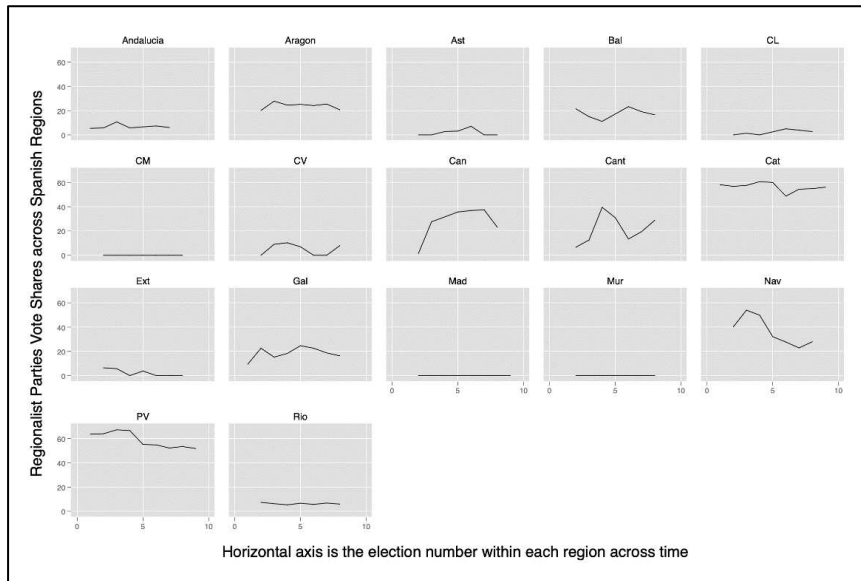
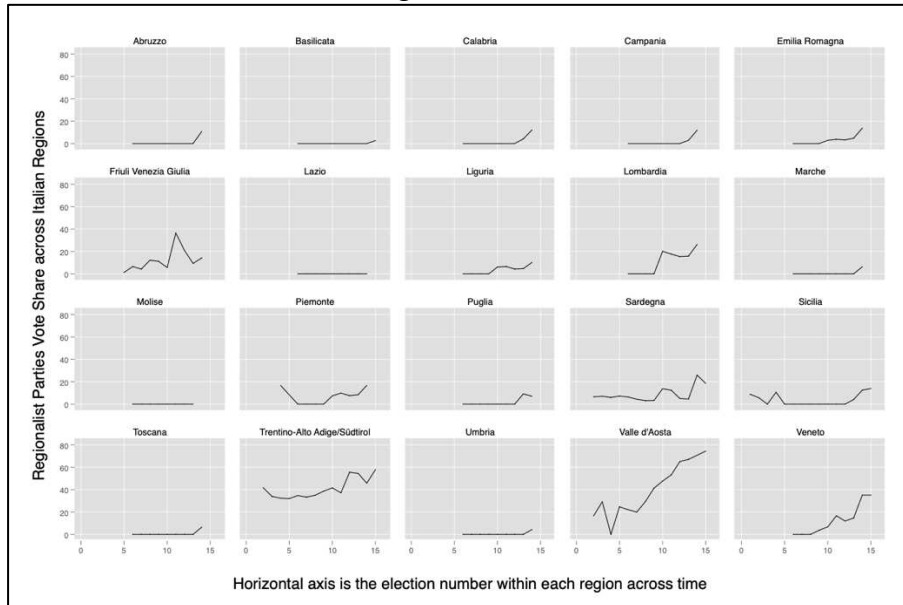


FIGURE A.6: Evolution of Regionalist Parties Electoral Shares in Italy



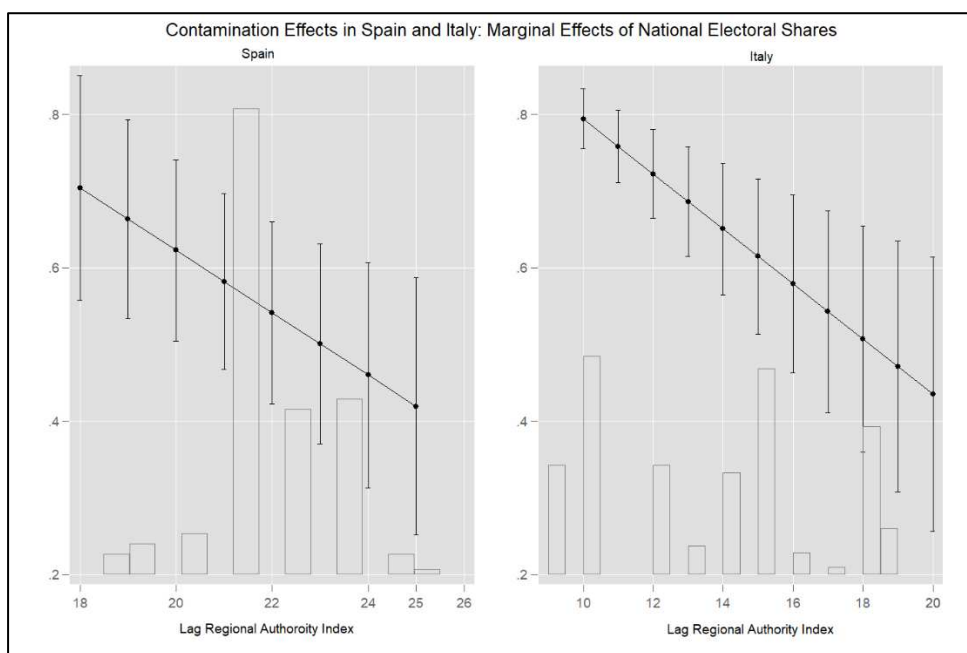
### APPENDIX 3: ANALYSES WITH REGIONAL AUTHORITY INDEX

Table A.2			
SPAIN: Contamination Effects	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
National Electoral Share	1.327*** (0.379)	1.436*** (0.396)	1.397*** (0.370)
RAI Index (lag)	2.157*** (0.743)	2.256 (1.359)	2.071 (1.424)
National Electoral Share X RAI Index (lag)	-0.036* (0.018)	-0.041** (0.019)	-0.031* (0.018)
Regional Prime Minister			8.321*** (1.661)
Affiliated			0.200 (2.059)
Regional PM X Affiliated			-4.859* (2.752)
Coalition Member			-3.415*** (1.038)
Days Passed			0.007* (0.004)
National Electoral Share X Days			-0.000 (0.000)
Constant	-32.399** (15.257)	-35.185 (27.157)	-39.059 (27.306)
Region-Party Fixed Effects	YES	YES	YES
Period Fixed Effects	NO	YES	YES
Observations	212	212	212
R-squared	0.446	0.468	0.531
Number of RP (party-regions)	33	33	33
Clustered standard errors at the region-party level in parentheses			
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1			

Table A.3			
ITALY: Contamination Effects	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
National Electoral Share	1.088***	1.153***	1.041***

	(0.088)	(0.094)	(0.103)
RAI Index (lag)	0.102	-0.059	-0.265
	(0.187)	(0.210)	(0.194)
National Electoral Share X RAI Index (lag)	-0.032***	-0.036***	-0.020*
	(0.009)	(0.010)	(0.011)
Regional Prime Minister			3.294***
			(1.203)
Affiliated			1.330***
			(0.486)
Regional PM X Affiliated			-1.862**
			(0.931)
Coalition Member			1.434***
			(0.462)
Days Passed			0.001
			(0.001)
National Electoral Share X Days			-0.000*
			(0.000)
Constant	4.380**	7.718***	6.356***
	(2.044)	(2.533)	(2.303)
Region-Party Fixed Effects	NO	NO	NO
Period Fixed Effects	NO	YES	YES
Observations	411	411	340
Number of RP (party-regions)	124	124	117
Clustered standard errors at the party-region level in parentheses			
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1			

**Figure A.7 Interaction effects with Regional Authority index (RAI)**



## APPENDIX 4: ANALYSES WITHOUT CLUSTERING

**Table A.4: Robustness Check. Spain without clustering at the region-party level**

Table A43 ROBUSTNESS. SPAIN				
No clustering	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
National Electoral Share	2.669*** (0.787)	3.698*** (0.915)	2.862*** (0.876)	3.379*** (0.931)
Self-Rule Index (lag)	7.778*** (2.531)	10.500*** (2.816)	8.937** (3.655)	8.450** (3.743)
National Electoral Share X Self Rule Index (lag)	-0.158*** (0.059)	-0.229*** (0.067)	-0.163** (0.069)	-0.192*** (0.071)
Regionalist Parties Share (lag)		0.309*** (0.116)		0.293** (0.129)
National Electoral Share X Reg. Parties Share (lag)		-0.006** (0.003)		-0.006* (0.003)
Constant	-89.545*** (33.197)	-131.003*** (37.898)	-113.318** (46.922)	-113.076** (48.100)
Covariates	NO	NO	YES	YES
Region-Party Fixed Effects	YES	YES	YES	YES
Period Fixed Effects	NO	NO	YES	YES
Observations	212	211	212	211
R-squared	0.442	0.463	0.543	0.555
Number of RP (party-regions)	33	33	33	33

Standard errors in parentheses, not clustered

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

**Table A.5: Robustness Check. Italy without clustering at the region-party level**

Table A.5 ROBUSTNESS. ITALY				
No Clustering	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
National Electoral Share	1.715*** (0.215)	1.638*** (0.215)	1.437*** (0.210)	1.236*** (0.212)

Self-Rule Index (lag)	1.381*** (0.494)	1.332*** (0.495)	0.606 (0.573)	0.473 (0.565)
National Electoral Share X Self Rule Index (lag)	-0.090*** (0.019)	-0.082*** (0.020)	-0.063*** (0.020)	-0.041** (0.021)
Regionalist Parties Share (lag)		-0.051 (0.056)		0.016 (0.049)
National Electoral Share X Regionalist Parties Share (lag)		-0.003 (0.002)		-0.006*** (0.002)
Constant	-10.376* (5.632)	-9.363* (5.554)	-2.785 (6.453)	-0.666 (6.306)
Covariates	NO	NO	YES	YES
Region-Party Fixed Effects	NO	NO	NO	NO
Period Fixed Effects	NO	NO	YES	YES
Observations	369	369	298	298
Number of RP (party-regions)	124	124	117	117

Standard errors in parentheses  
\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

## APPENDIX 5: ANALYSES WITH CONTEMPORANEOUS VALUES

**Table A.6: Robustness Check. Spain with contemporaneous values.**

Table A.6 ROBUSTNESS. SPAIN		
Contemporaneous values	Model 1	Model 2
National Electoral Share	1.226 (0.911)	1.464 (0.997)
Self-Rule Index (contemporaneous)	3.601 (4.567)	5.229 (5.153)

National Electoral Share X Self Rule Index (contemporaneous)	-0.033 (0.072)	-0.048 (0.077)
Regionalist Parties Share (contemporaneous)		-0.056 (0.207)
National Electoral Share X Self Rule Index (contemporaneous)		-0.002 (0.003)
Constant	-45.217 (59.342)	-65.343 (65.535)
Covariates	YES	YESs
Region-Party Fixed Effects	YES	YES
Period Fixed Effects	YES	YES
Observations	179	179
R-squared	0.520	0.530
Number of RP (party-regions)	33	33
Clustered standard errors at the region-party level in parentheses		
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1		

**Table A.7: Robustness Check. Italy with contemporaneous values.**

Table A.7 ROBUSTNESS. ITALY		
Contemporaneous values	Model 1	Model 2
National Electoral Share	1.287*** (0.187)	0.958*** (0.151)
Self-Rule Index (contemporaneous value)	0.008 (0.425)	-0.202 (0.363)
National Electoral Share X Self Rule Index (contemporaneous value)	-0.046** (0.019)	-0.011 (0.015)
Regionalist Parties Share (contemporaneous value)		0.042 (0.039)
National Electoral Share X Regionalist Parties Share (contemporaneous)		-0.010***

Constant	5.769 (8.515)	(0.002) 8.713 (7.984)
Covariates	YES	YES
Region-Party Fixed Effects	NO	NO
Period Fixed Effects	YES	YES
Observations	409	409
Number of RP (party-regions)	120	120
Clustered standard errors at the region-party level in parentheses		
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1		